

## REVIEWS OF BOOKS

There are, however, certain aspects of the subject upon which we should like further elucidation, and others with which we cannot agree. We should like to know whether or not, in Professor Sorsby's opinion, notification of ophthalmia neonatorum is of real practical value. On page 10 he tells us of the wide differences between rates of notification in different parts of the country. He gives in statistical tables what would seem to be remarkable results obtained in Birmingham, where the rate of blindness per 100,000 births has been reduced to nil. Should he not perhaps have emphasized the importance of ensuring notification? It seems to us obvious that in many places cases of ophthalmia neonatorum are not being notified within the meaning of the regulation, for we cannot believe that the condition can possibly vary in adjacent towns to the extent shown by the author's figures.

Much space has been taken up by figures, tables and graphs. We think that authors should be reminded sometimes that statistics are notoriously unreliable and also occasionally difficult to understand. For example, there seems to be a discrepancy between the figures given on page 15 (15 cases in 1943) and on page 16 (17 cases in 1938-1943) for the "number blind from ophthalmia neonatorum". Are we to conclude that the number of blind babies at the Sunshine Homes was only 2 for the period 1938-1942? No doubt there is another explanation. When we arrive at the clinical section of the book, we must confess to being at a loss to understand why obviously selected figures have been included. If we are to understand that the author adheres to the classical definition of ophthalmia neonatorum as a purulent discharge which occurs within twenty-one days of birth, the figures and percentages on page 27 would appear to be of little value.

Perhaps we find ourselves most at variance with Professor Sorsby in his remarks on prophylaxis. On page 31 he says: "The prevention of ophthalmia neonatorum lies in the first place in the treatment of the expectant mother, and this would seem at present to be an aspiration rather than the reality." We feel that this is scarcely just to those who for years have been engaged in antenatal work. In our view, a great part of the decrease in blindness—or at all events in gonococcal ophthalmia—is due to the antenatal treatment which infected mothers have received from antenatal and venereal diseases medical officers. We think that some credit might have been given where it is certainly due.

The section on treatment should be read and considered carefully by anyone who has to do with the care of such cases. Few can have had the experience of Professor Sorsby, and many should benefit by the precisely and clearly stated methods of procedure. The author's advice on the use of penicillin, with its advocacy of treatment every five minutes, makes one wonder whether staffing would not present a considerable difficulty. Would Professor Sorsby approve of the substitution of three-hourly intramuscular injections of penicillin for the "every five minutes" drop method? We have found it to be successful in one case in which penicillin drops failed ingloriously. As regards the treatment of non-gonococcal cases with sulphonamides, we should like more specific information. Would it not be reasonable to suggest that only those patients affected with sulphonamide-sensitive infections will respond, and that in (say) *Staphylococcus aureus* infections, failure will result?

In conclusion, since the monograph, according to its subtitle, is dealing with the problem of ophthalmia neonatorum, I think that the administrative side might with advantage have been discussed, even at the expense of some of the statistical tables. In my view only those who are treating the condition regularly, and are, so to speak, in practice, are competent to do so. I believe that centralization, by means of which cases would be collected into one centre from certain areas, is preferable to an attempt to treat the occasional patient at the local hospital or in the home; I should like to suggest that the returns for Wales confirm my belief.

E. W. A.

*People Who Live in Glass Houses.* By Harold Thomas. 80 pp. The Central Council for Health Education, London, 1945. Price 9d.

The author of this excellent little book—a Venereal Diseases Orderly—has achieved his object of producing an informative and objective account of the venereal diseases, which can be easily understood by the man in the street. This is no mean feat and he is to be congratulated. The author is obviously a man of wide experience and humanitarian principles, who projects these qualities into his book. The result is an interesting level-headed monograph which holds the attention of the reader. In short, if this booklet is widely disseminated amongst the general public, it will prove to be a most useful adjunct to the campaign against venereal diseases.

I. N. O. P.

*An Experiment in the Psychiatric Treatment of Promiscuous girls.* By Ernest G. Lion, M.D., Helen M. Jambor, Hazle G. Corrigan and Katherine P. Bradway, Ph.D. A report issued by the City and County of San Francisco Department of Public Health in 1945, published as a supplement to the *Journal of Venereal Disease Information* and issued to subscribers to the journal.

This is a brochure of 68 pages and has a Foreword by J. R. Heller, Jun., M.D., Medical Director of the Venereal Disease Division of the United States Public Health Service. The investigation described in the report, which was carried out by a special team from the Psychiatric Service of the San Francisco City Clinic, is an interesting example of the cooperation of Federal, State,